

Dear Mrs Graves

Hoe and Worthing Parish Meeting was grateful to be provided with a copy of the letter below. It represented the first reliable information made publicly available after parishes had been alarmingly and suddenly informed that the submission of an application to establish up to 10,000 new homes between North Elmham, Billingford and Bintree was imminent, with only two weeks available to submit objections (sic) to the council leader although there was almost no other detail available.

During the ten days between receiving this extremely startling news on 11th July and your letter on 20th July our parish endeavoured to acquaint itself with as much information as possible regarding the proposal but discovered very little, in circumstances where every council officer at every level and every council member stated they had no knowledge about the matter whatsoever. In due course, after flurried local activity we submitted a series of queries covering three broad topics to the leader of the council that were forwarded via our district councillor; in short these related to the general policy that Breckland has towards the development of garden towns in the district, the view it takes of the current matter and the manner in which the authority dealt with it after the initial approach from the developers. We have now received a reply directly from the leader of the council which paraphrases the letter you provided, in answer to the first two issues. Neither letter makes any reference to the third issue and both give rise to a number of further queries.

Our parishioners are anxious to receive assurance that our council will deal with any approach made to them with a proposal to establish a garden town, in a manner that is transparent, accountable, in line with its own protocols and provides public confidence. In this case that confidence has not been established and some clarity would be appreciated regarding what happened during the time after the authority were approached by the developers and the date on which the news broke. What is currently evident from your letter is that Breckland, as the planning authority, were somehow made aware of the proposal some weeks before the letter date and that on 26th June a site meeting took place. On July 10th one of the two councillors for Upper Wensum Ward met with the developers at their request, although we were subsequently informed by the other ward member that a site meeting had been agreed, at the suggestion of the Leader of the Council, for both members to attend two weeks later. He could not account for what had taken place but indicated he was very upset. It is extremely difficult to marry up this very worrying process and sketchy information with the planning authority's normal practice for dealing with planning applications or for pre-submission advice. It also seems a considerable distance from the protocol issued to committee councillors who are lobbied by applicants and as stated we would be grateful if you could clarify what took place.

This is a multi-million pound development, in a currently undeveloped rural area, that will exceed the objectively assessed housing need for the district by a very large margin and it is the first to be proposed in the county. The necessary housing provision through to 2036 has been calculated at 15,000 new homes according to a well-publicised and open, step by step process that met with government guidelines and included considerable public consultation. As a result of what has happened so far in this case there is concern that the same level of openness and public involvement will not be a feature of your approach to garden town development. We would be grateful if you would assist by clarifying the following matters.

- Our parish contributed in the various public consultations during the process of compiling the emerging local plan. That document is now in the final stage of inspection and includes the objectively assessed housing need for the district and a strategy for delivering it. You have stated that other districts in the county have engaged in the same process to produce their own local plans and so the housing need in Norfolk and its proposed method of provision is known through to 2036, along with the policies that will apply to development through to that date.

The government has stated in its earlier prospectus that it is interested in working with local authorities prepared to commit to delivery of housing over and above their objectively assessed housing need and in your letter you have indicated that Breckland District Council is prepared to do that. We would be grateful if you could tell us how and when that decision was made.

- The government stated in respect of garden towns'....it is important they are a response meeting housing need locally'. Your letter is specific in indicating a commitment to serving housing need beyond the district boundaries but it is ambiguous in terms of the geographic extent to which you would seek to satisfy that unmet housing need. As the need is now identified in each district, along with a strategy for its delivery in local plans through to 2036, are you proposing to meet housing need identified beyond the county boundary?
- You have stated that Breckland considers a county-wide discussion under The duty to Co-operate should consider whether a garden town is appropriate for Norfolk in meeting future housing need and if so where in the county it should be situated. You have invited the proposers of the current scheme to provide what evidence they can to inform such a discussion but given that it has been possible for developers to propose Garden Cities/Towns/Villages for several years why has that conversation not already taken place and a distinct policy now emerged.
- You do say that garden towns were considered as part of the emerging local plan but '....no suitable options for new settlements were identified'. What was identified in the process was that the bulk of the objectively assessed housing need would be restricted to an area within the A11 corridor, on the southern boundary of the district, while the area near the northern boundary was assessed as suitable for extremely limited development indeed. When the issue of suitable options for new settlements was discussed what view was taken of the area in the north of the district that is now being promoted?
- The prospectus issued in 2016 specifically referred in its title to 'Locally-led Garden Cities and Towns' and in the body repeated the theme by indicating they should be '....in places where communities want them'. As you have said they were considered as part of the local plan, which had extended periods of public consultation during the years of its compilation, why did those consultations not include garden towns?
- The 2016 government prospectus was cancelled last week and its replacement is yet to be published. You have informed the developers in this case that, like them, you await the issue of the next government prospectus and 'During this period of consultation, it may be possible for Breckland Council to consider more formally and with its partnership authorities how it may or may not formally support the proposal (based on what I have outlined above)'. We were entirely unaware there was any period of consultation and would be grateful if you could explain what consultation is referred to.

This appears to be entirely at odds with the letter from the Leader of the Council which states 'Having not received any formal proposal we are not in a position to give this concept detailed consideration or to state a formal position on the project put forward by Lanpro'. It seems it must be sufficiently detailed to allow a conclusion to be reached regarding whether or not to offer your formal support as you have indicated to the developers. This is nothing short of baffling when you state that the most significant thing before the council can give an opinion is 'there should be full and extensive public engagement from the outset, with parishes, community groups and businesses to gain support and understanding'. None of those things have taken place, leaving local communities entirely in the dark and feeling ignored. As no community engagement of any kind has been attempted either by the developers or the local planning authority could you please explain if

you intend nevertheless to reach a formal conclusion and whether the process will be accessible in any way to parishes.

Having said all of that you can probably appreciate there is considerable concern in our parish that the high level of early public involvement in future schemes promised by the Government has not been apparent so far in this case. It is most concerning when the consistent feedback from communities close to the earliest of the 23 schemes that have now been authorised is that they felt ignored, side-lined, uninformed, told what they wanted rather than being asked and swamped by the outcome. The government professed a determination to ensure the scheme would not allow those outcomes as it moved forward and we are most anxious it does not continue to be the experience of the existing community here.

At this point we have not met to discuss the issue because of the paucity of information made available to us and have not rushed to reach precipitate and uninformed conclusions. We would be extremely grateful for any information you can supply regarding the specifics of this proposal, what we might expect to happen next and when that might happen. We would also ask that you clarify the points raised in this letter as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely

Trevor wood
Chairman, Hoe and Worthing Parish Meeting

Dear Parishes

Please find below the response to Lanpro that William Nunn has asked the chief executive of Breckland to send on his behalf. Many thanks to those of you who wrote to William Nunn in the last few days as it was very helpful.

Best wishes

Bill

BILL BORRETT
Member for The Upper Wensum Ward
Breckland District Council

Dear Mr Leeming
Proposed Mid-Norfolk Garden Town

Thank you for your letter which I think you incorrectly dated 3 June. I think this should be 3 July. We welcomed the site visit on the 26 June, and your outline and explanation of the proposal and the work you have completed to date.

As already explained Breckland Council as the local planning authority have only in the last month been made aware of your proposal, and as yet have not had time to consider this formally through our council processes. In the meantime this is an officer response based on our current understanding of your proposal and the position the council is in through its own local plan making.

Under the Duty to Cooperate, the Council is committed to addressing housing need, both within and beyond the authority's boundaries. The Council welcomes innovative proposals to provide new housing, and we are always open to discussions regarding opportunities for a new settlement or Garden Town, where this is supported by evidence. Garden Towns/ villages can provide opportunities for the use of design as an exemplar to promote a step-change in the quality of built development.

Before giving an opinion the Council must be certain that any proposal represents a sustainable option for growth and that there are mechanisms to fund and deliver the infrastructure needed to support such bespoke expansion. Most significantly, there should be full and extensive public engagement from the outset, with parishes, community groups, and businesses to gain support and understanding. This needs to be led and supported by the promoters.

It is important that strategic scale development proposals to serve housing need beyond the District's boundaries are also supported by partner authorities, and ideally are highlighted within relevant Local Plans. Within Norfolk, all Local Planning Authorities have formed a cooperative Strategic Planning Member Forum, in addition to an officers group to produce a set of agreements on strategic planning issues known as the Norfolk Strategic Planning Framework (NSPF). The current agreement is that the Norfolk Planning Authorities will produce documents which provide for the development needs of their areas until at least 2036. This agreement is set to be reviewed in light of proposals set out in the consultation on the National Planning Policy Framework, and therefore there is scope in the near future to revisit this position in considering future housing needs.

The Council's proposed Local Plan strategy is at the final stages of Examination and will enable Breckland to meet objectively assessed housing need within the District. The approach focusses the distribution of that housing growth via strategic urban extensions to Thetford and Attleborough, aligned to the economic growth potential of the Cambridge to Norwich Technology corridor. Further sustainable growth is planned to be distributed across the remaining market towns, local service centre villages and other rural villages. The Local Plan did consider a new settlement as an option to meet housing need but the proposal had not been promoted to the Council at that time, and no suitable options for new settlements were identified.

The proposed Garden Town seeks to plan for a scale of growth significantly in excess of the current objectively assessed housing need for the District to 2036, and would serve housing need beyond Breckland's boundaries. Whilst the proposal for a new settlement does not align with the Council's current spatial vision for the District to 2036 as set out in its new Local Plan, or the current NSPF, the Council would be open to further discussion and consideration of any proposal which aligns with the Government's objective to significantly boost the supply of housing.

The Council considers that proposals for addressing future housing need should be considered as part of a wider discussion, held on a County-wide basis under the Duty to Cooperate to establish how Norfolk wishes to plan to meet need beyond the current round of plans that look to 2036. This could include whether a new freestanding settlement is an appropriate response to any future housing target, and if a new settlement is desirable, where best this might be sited. Any evidence you are able to provide to support the concept of a garden town in Breckland and inform such a discussion, would be helpful.

Like you, we await the government's issue of its next version of the Garden Town prospectus and its call for sites. During this period of consultation, it may be possible for Breckland Council to consider more formally and with its partnership authorities how it may or may not formally support the proposal based on what I have outlined above.

I do require clarification on a particular issue, which seems at odds to what I understood from our original discussion. Within your letter you set out that the Norfolk Railway Village Ltd (NRV) is looking to make a

formal submission for the Mid Norfolk Garden Town (MNGT) proposal into the next round of UK Government's new garden town and village call-for-sites.

I have received a letter from the chairman of the Mid Norfolk Railway Trust, quite clearly setting out that they have no formal relationship with Lanpro, there has been nothing more than exploratory discussions, and have not entered into any formal agreements nor intend to do so in the foreseeable future. They stress they have had no involvement, control or input into the plans for the new township.

Your views on this would be welcomed.

Regards
Anna Graves

Anna Graves | Chief Executive | Breckland Council and South Holland District Council